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E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: DAILY SUMMARY OF JAPANESE PRESS 01/16/08

INDEX:

- (1) Poll on Fukuda cabinet, political parties, new antiterror law (Tokyo Shimbun)
- (2) Poll on Fukuda cabinet, political parties, new antiterror law (Asahi)
- (3) Poll on Fukuda cabinet, political parties, new antiterror law, permanent SDF dispatch legislation (Nikkei)
- (4) Sense of alarm spreading in ruling camp over policy of keeping provision tax rate, given declining public support for Fukuda cabinet (Yomiuri)
- (5) Cornered ruling parties to once again apply measure of last resort: Determined to adopt amendment to gas tax in second vote in Lower House; Passage of bill within current fiscal year uncertain (Tokyo Shimbun)
- (6) 2008 Hokkaido Lake Toya Summit: NGOs to assemble in Hokkaido to provide policy proposals to G-8 leaders (Mainichi)
- (7) Seiron (Opinion) column by Hisahiko Okazaki: Hope for DPP-led government to bring peace to the Taiwan Strait (Sankei)
- (8) Koga, Tanigaki factions to formally agree today to merger plan; Factional realignment to be accelerated with eye on Lower House dissolution (Mainichi)

(9) Extraordinary session of divided Diet closes without breaking away from 1955 political framework (Asahi)

ARTICLES:

(1) Poll on Fukuda cabinet, political parties, new antiterror law

TOKYO SHIMBUN (Page 2) (Abridged)  
January 13, 2008

Questions & Answers

(Figures shown in percentage. Parentheses denote the results of the last survey conducted Dec. 15-16 last year.)

Q: Do you support the Fukuda cabinet?

Yes 41.4 (35.3)

No 42.8 (47.6)

Don't know (D/K) + no answer (N/A) 15.8 (17.1)

Q: (Only for those who answered "yes" to the previous question)

What's the primary reason for your approval of the Fukuda cabinet?

Pick only one from among those listed below.

The prime minister is trustworthy 20.5 (22.9)

Because it's a coalition cabinet of the Liberal Democratic Party and New Komeito 8.4 (7.5)

The prime minister has leadership ability 4.3 (4.4)

Something can be expected of its economic policies 5.6 (3.2)

Something can be expected of its foreign policies 6.2 (5.9)

Something can be expected of its political reforms 3.3 (2.3)

Something can be expected of its tax reforms 1.9 (1.9)

TOKYO 00000127 002 OF 014

Something can be expected of its administrative reforms 3.3 (2.4)

There's no other appropriate person (for prime minister) 45.1 (46.6)

Other answers (O/A) 0.3 (0.9)

D/K+N/A 1.1 (2.0)

Q: (Only for those who answered "no" to the first question) What's the primary reason for your disapproval of the Fukuda cabinet? Pick only one from among those listed below.

The prime minister is untrustworthy 7.9 (12.5)

Because it's a coalition cabinet of the Liberal Democratic Party and the New Komeito 9.8 (8.4)

The prime minister lacks leadership ability 19.6 (16.5)

Nothing can be expected of its economic policies 25.9 (21.6)

Nothing can be expected of its foreign policies 3.6 (2.7)

Nothing can be expected of its political reforms 12.6 (13.5)

Nothing can be expected of its tax reforms 8.3 (8.4)

Nothing can be expected of its administrative reforms 4.7 (8.7)

Don't like the prime minister's personal character 6.5 (5.2)

O/A 0.7 (1.7)

D/K+N/A 0.4 (0.8)

Q: The Diet has now enacted a new law that replaces the Antiterrorism Special Measures Law. This law is for the Maritime Self-Defense Force to back up U.S. and other foreign naval vessels in the Indian Ocean with fuel and water supply. Do you appreciate this law?

Yes 44.1

No 43.9

D/K+N/A 12.0

Q: This law was voted down in the House of Councillors with the opposition bench voting against it, and it was enacted in a second vote of the House of Representatives with the ruling coalition of the Liberal Democratic Party and New Komeito voting for it with a majority of two-thirds. Do you think the lower chamber's overriding of the upper chamber's decision was appropriate?

Yes 41.6

No 46.7  
D/K+N/A 11.7

Q: (Only for those who answered "no" to the foregoing question) Why?  
(One choice only)

Because there's no need for refueling activities 25.0  
Because the Diet did not fully deliberate on it 48.8  
Because it should have been scrapped without the House of  
Representatives' second vote 22.3  
O/A 1.4  
D/K+N/A 2.5

Q: Would you like the current LDP-led coalition to remain in office,  
or would you otherwise like it to be replaced with a coalition  
centering on the Democratic Party of Japan (Minshuto)?

LDP-led government 35.0 (28.5)  
DPJ-led government 41.5 (44.7)  
D/K+N/A 23.5 (26.8)

TOKYO 00000127 003 OF 014

Q: The House of Representatives' current membership is up until  
September 2009. When would you like the next election to take place  
for the House of Representatives?

During the first half of this year 22.9  
During the latter half of this year 29.6  
During the first half of next year 8.4  
Upon the current term's expiry in September next year 31.8  
D/K+N/A 7.3

Q: Which political party do you support?

Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) 32.0 (25.2)  
Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ or Minshuto) 27.0 (28.5)  
New Komeito (NK) 4.4 (3.1)  
Japanese Communist Party (JCP) 2.3 (3.6)  
Social Democratic Party (SDP or Shaminto) 1.5 (1.5)  
People's New Party (PNP or Kokumin Shinto) 0.6 (0.3)  
New Party Nippon (NPN or Shinto Nippon) 0.4 (0.2)  
Other political parties, groups --- (---)  
None 30.5 (36.0)  
D/K+N/A 1.3 (1.6)

Polling methodology: The survey was conducted across the nation on  
Jan. 11-12 by Kyodo News Service on a computer-aided random digit  
dialing (RDD) basis. Among randomly generated telephone numbers,  
those actually for household use with one or more eligible voters  
totaled 1,470. Answers were obtained from 1,027 persons.

(2) Poll on Fukuda cabinet, political parties, new antiterror law

ASAHI (Page 2) (Full)  
January 13, 2008

#### Questions & Answers

(Figures shown in percentage, rounded off. Bracketed figures denote  
proportions to all respondents. Figures in parentheses denote the  
results of the last survey conducted Dec. 19-20, 2007.)

Q: Do you support the Fukuda cabinet?

Yes 34 (31)  
No 45 (48)

Q: Why? (One reason only. Left column for those marking "yes" on  
previous question, and right for those saying "no.")

The prime minister is Mr. Fukuda 19(6) 4(2)  
It's an LDP-led cabinet 32(11) 36(16)  
From the aspect of policies 21(7) 50(22)  
No particular reason 26(9) 8(4)

Q: Which political party do you support now?

Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) 26 (27)  
Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ or Minshuto) 25 (25)  
New Komeito (NK) 3 (3)  
Japanese Communist Party (JCP) 1 (2)  
Social Democratic Party (SDP or Shaminto) 1 (1)  
People's New Party (PNP or Kokumin Shinto) 0 (0)  
New Party Nippon (NPN or Shinto Nippon) 0 (0)  
Other political parties 0 (1)

TOKYO 00000127 004 OF 014

None 37 (33)  
No answer (N/A) + don't know (D/K) 7 (8)

Q: The U.S. and other countries have sent naval vessels to the Indian Ocean for antiterror operations in Afghanistan. The Antiterrorism Special Measures Law, which was for the Self-Defense Forces to back up their naval operations in the Indian Ocean, expired on Nov. 1, and the SDF discontinued its activities there. Do you think Japan should resume SDF activities there?

Yes 34 (37)  
No 48 (48)

Q: The Diet has now enacted a new law that replaces the Antiterrorism Special Measures Law. This law limits SDF activities in the Indian Ocean to fuel and water supply for a period of one year, and it does not require the government to ask the Diet for its approval of SDF activities there. Do you support this law?

Yes 36  
No 40

Q: This law was enacted in a second vote of the House of Representatives with a majority of two-thirds after it was voted down in the House of Councillors. Do you think the ruling coalition's overriding of the upper chamber's decision was appropriate?

Yes 41  
No 41

Q: A bill voted down in the House of Councillors is passed in a second vote of the House of Representatives for enactment into law with a majority of two-thirds. Do you support this way of doing things for other bills?

Yes 18  
No 35  
Can't say which 44

Q: The Diet has now enacted a law to provide across-the-board relief to all hepatitis C victims of government-approved blood products over their class action lawsuits against the government. Do you support Prime Minister Fukuda's response to this issue?

Yes 71  
No 19

Q: Do you appreciate the Fukuda cabinet for its way of handling the pending issue of unaccounted-for pension records?

Yes 26 (36)  
No 55 (46)

Q: Do you think the House of Representatives should be dissolved as soon as possible for a general election, or do you otherwise think there is no need to do so?

Dissolve as soon as possible 34 (39)  
No need to do so 54 (48)

Q: If you were to vote now in a general election, which political

TOKYO 00000127 005 OF 014

party would you like to vote for in your proportional representation bloc?

LDP 25 (23)  
DPJ 36 (38)  
NK 3 (3)  
JCP 3 (3)  
SDP 3 (1)  
PNP 0 (0)  
NPN 0 (0)  
Other political parties 0 (1)  
N/A+D/K 30 (31)

Q: Would you like the current LDP-led coalition government to continue, or would you otherwise like it to be replaced with a DPJ-led coalition government?

LDP-led coalition government 27 (28)  
DPJ-led coalition government 35 (41)

Polling methodology: The survey was conducted Jan. 11-12 over the telephone on a computer-aided random digit dialing (RDD) basis. Respondents were chosen from among the nation's voting population on a three-stage random-sampling basis. Valid answers were obtained from 956 persons (60 PERCENT ).

(3) Poll on Fukuda cabinet, political parties, new antiterror law, permanent SDF dispatch legislation

NIKKEI (Page 2) (Full)  
January 13, 2008

#### Questions & Answers

(Figures shown in percentage. Parentheses denote findings from the last survey conducted in December last year.)

Q: Do you support the Fukuda cabinet?

Yes 42 (43)  
No 46 (46)  
Can't say (C/S) + don't know (D/K) 12 (11)

Q: Which political party do you support or like now?

Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) 36 (38)  
Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ or Minshuto) 30 (34)  
New Komeito (NK) 4 (4)  
Japanese Communist Party (JCP) 3 (4)  
Social Democratic Party (SDP or Shaminto) 3 (2)  
People's New Party (PNP or Kokumin Shinto) 0 (1)  
New Party Nippon (NPN or Shinto Nippon) 0 (0)  
Other political parties 1 (0)  
None 16 (12)  
C/S+D/K 6 (5)

Q: The Diet has now enacted a law to resume the Maritime Self-Defense Force's refueling mission in the Indian Ocean. A bill for this law was voted down in the House of Councillors, and the ruling coalition passed it in a second vote of the House of Representatives for enactment into law. Do you support this legislation?

TOKYO 00000127 006 OF 014

Yes 43  
No 38

Q: The LDP and the DPJ have plans to create a permanent law for Japan to send the Self-Defense Forces for overseas missions whenever necessary. Do you support this legislative initiative?

Yes 35  
No 46

(Note) The total percentage does not become 100 PERCENT in some

cases due to rounding.

Polling methodology: The survey was taken on Jan. 11-12 by Nikkei Research Inc. over the telephone on a random digit dialing (RDD) basis. For the survey, samples were chosen from among men and women aged 20 and over across the nation. A total of 1,277 households with one or more eligible voters were sampled, and answers were obtained from 744 persons (58.3 PERCENT ).

(4) Sense of alarm spreading in ruling camp over policy of keeping provision tax rate, given declining public support for Fukuda cabinet

YOMIURI (Page 4) (Full)  
January 16, 2008

The latest opinion poll by Yomiuri Shimbun found a drop in public support for the Fukuda cabinet. Even while showing a cool response to the survey result, the government and the ruling camp are becoming nervous about future moves by the opposition camp over the government's bill amending the Special Taxation Measures Law and public reactions to it.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Machimura said in a press conference yesterday: "Without being affected by public support rates for the cabinet, we will continue to do our best. This basic stance remains unchanged."

Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) Secretary General Ibuki said the same day: "If the public opinion survey results lead politicians to determine politics, the result would be that lawmakers will lower themselves." On the approach taken by the ruling camp of using its two-third lower chamber overriding vote to pass the new antiterrorism bill, the ayes and nays are equally divided among the public. In reference to this, Ibuki commented: "Criticism of both ruling and opposition camps for leading to the use of an overriding vote is included in negative replies."

Learning that about 60 PERCENT said they were against the ruling coalition's policy of keeping the current provisional high tax rate on gasoline, many in the government and the ruling camp harbor a sense of alarm. A first-time-elected lawmaker of the LDP grumbled: "If the party takes a wrong step on this issue, public support for the cabinet may plummet at one stroke."

In this connection, LDP Diet Affairs Committee Chairman Tadamori Oshima told reporters in the Diet building: "(If asked,) (the people) are expected to say that it is desirable to see (the prices of) gasoline drop, but such replies are different from their comprehensive judgment." He then stressed that the government will give a full explanation to the opposition bloc and the public to

TOKYO 00000127 007 OF 014

have them understand the ruling camp's policy.

Speaking before reporters at party headquarters, Democratic Party of Japan Secretary General Hatoyama spoke of the public opinion survey result on the provisional gas tax rate and indicated that his party will step up its attack on the government over the issue in the ordinary Diet session to open on Jan. 18. He said: "The result showed that most respondents think that the provision tax rate naturally should be scrapped when it expires. Our party, together with the public, will fight against the ruling camp to protect the people's livelihood."

(5) Cornered ruling parties to once again apply measure of last resort: Determined to adopt amendment to gas tax in second vote in Lower House; Passage of bill within current fiscal year uncertain

TOKYO SHIMBUN (Page 2) (Full)  
January 16, 2008

The ruling parties yesterday decided to pass a bill amending the Special Tax Measures Law, including the maintaining of the provisional rate added to the gasoline tax, out of a sense of alarm that the Fukuda Cabinet would suffer a major blow if it fails to

maintain that tax. However, it will not be an easy task for the government and the ruling parties to maintain the provisional tax and prevent gasoline prices from falling even resorting to using its last card, putting the bill to a second vote in the Lower House.

Liberal Democratic Party Diet Policy Committee Chairman Tadamori Oshima speaking to a meeting of secretaries general and Diet Affairs Committee chairmen of the ruling parties yesterday, appealed that the provisional tax rate be maintained, "Let's tackle it with resourcefulness and solidarity so that we can resolve the issue by the end of March."

The ruling parties even decided to resort to a second vote in the Lower House, which could bring about a backlash from the public. They made the judgment that giving up on maintaining the provisional tax would deal a greater blow to the Fukuda cabinet than approving the bill again in the Lower House. The government and the ruling parties intend to maintain the provisional tax for another decade as special-purpose road construction resources. They are concerned that failure to obtain Diet approval for the bill amending the Special Tax Measures Law would affect various fields in such a way as to cause commotion in the financial market, triggered by a drop in gasoline prices.

However, their last resort of approving the bill again in the Lower House backed by the overwhelming two-third majority of the ruling parties could not be used unless the bill is voted down in the Upper House or 60 days pass after the bill was sent to the Upper House.

As such, the ruling parties want to submit the bill around Jan. 25, although it used to do so in February in the past. It intends to finish deliberations in about 20 days so that the measure clears the Lower House in mid-February instead of early March as has been the pattern in the past. This is in order to secure sufficient deliberation time in the Upper House so that conditions for the DPJ to take a vote on the bill within the current fiscal year can be set.

The DPJ yesterday formed a gasoline price cut force consisting of

TOKYO 00000127 008 OF 014

junior lawmakers with eye on even applying physical resistance in the Diet.

Deputy President Naoto Kan during the inauguration ceremony encouraged members, "Do your best in a clean-slate state with the determination to press hard when necessary."

LDP Secretary General Bunmei Ibuki during a press conference yesterday sought to check the DPJ from increasingly becoming hard-lined, noting, "It is strange for the Upper House to spend 50 days on deliberations on the bill, when the Lower House can take a vote on it in some 20 days." However, the DPJ is increasingly turning up its voltage. The ruling parties' troubles will likely continue for some time to come.

(6) 2008 Hokkaido Lake Toya Summit: NGOs to assemble in Hokkaido to provide policy proposals to G-8 leaders

Mainichi online (Full)  
January 12, 2008

? G-8 summit a test case for central and Hokkaido governments to establish ties with NGOs

Various groups, including nongovernmental organizations (NGO), are proactively pushing ahead with preparations to have civic voices reflected in the upcoming Lake Toya Summit (the annual major industrialized countries' summit to be held on July 7-9). In recent G-8 summits, NGOs demonstrated their enhanced presence, for instance, by presenting policy recommendations to the G-8 leaders. A number of groups, including the G-8 Summit NGO Forum, a community composed of domestic NGOs based in Tokyo, have decided to gather together in Hokkaido in conjunction when the Lake Toya Summit and send a message to the world. Administrative organizations are remotely related to civic groups in Japan, compared with those in

Western countries. The upcoming summit will serve as a test case for the central and Hokkaido governments to establish relations with NGOs.

The G-8 Summit NGO Forum was set up in January of last year, with an eye to the Lake Toya Summit, as the nation's first cross-sectional organization with 103 NGOs and other groups addressing international tasks as its members. The forum plans to compile a package of recommendations covering the areas of (1) the environment; (2) poverty and development; and (3) human rights and peace. The group will present the report to the governments of the G-8 countries. The group is preparing to hold an alternative summit (tentative name) in Sapporo on July 6-8 in cooperation with the G-8 Summit Civic Forum Hokkaido in Sapporo - composed of 40 groups inside and outside Hokkaido.

Plans have also been made to hold a summit of indigenous peoples across the world and another summit of religious leaders from about 20 countries, both in Sapporo, in order to offer opinions to the leaders.

NGOs - well versed in the actual state of assistance for developing countries - have increased their influence in the international community recently. In the Cologne Summit in Germany in 1999, the G-8 leaders agreed to relinquish their loan claims on poor countries in response to a call from NGOs. In the St. Petersburg Summit in 2006 in Russia and the Heiligendamm Summit in 2007 in Germany,

TOKYO 00000127 009 OF 014

representatives from NGOs met government representatives from the G-8 countries and also met even with the president and the prime minister of the host nation in each summit. The G-8 Summit NGO Forum Secretariat has continued negotiations with the Foreign Ministry in

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hopes of being given an opportunity to make policy advice directly to the Japanese prime minister this time, too.

In Heiligendamm, 100,000 persons linked to NGOs assembled in neighboring towns. During the session, camping grounds were opened for NGO members, and admission cards to the International Media Center (IMC) were issued to 100 members of 50 groups. Although there was a scene in which an anti-globalism demonstrative gave rise to confusion, International Cooperation NGO Center President Masaaki Ohashi said: "Only violent demonstrations were focused on in reporting, and most were peaceful activities."

An official of the Foreign Ministry's G-8 Summit Preparation Office said: "Since there are geographical restrictions, unlike Europe, we cannot forecast how many people will gather this time." But the secretariat expects several thousand people to enter Hokkaido.

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In the Kyushu / Okinawa Summit in 2000, the Foreign Ministry provided NGOs a base of operations but did not allow them to enter the IMC. An NGO member claimed: "We were isolated diplomatically." President Ohashi stated: "Most NGOs are against the use of violence. We want the government to give us a chance to make an appeal in Hokkaido, without becoming too nervous."

Major events planned by NGOs in Hokkaido:

? Alternative summit (July 6-8) to be co-sponsored by the G-8 Summit NGO Forum and the G-8 Summit Civic Forum Hokkaido. Symposiums on "the environment," "poverty and development," and "human rights and peace" will be held during the session.

? Summit of indigenous peoples: (from June 28 through July 4) to be sponsored by the Indigenous People Summit Ainu Mosir 2008, inviting about 20 natives from the United States, Latin America, and Asia. Reports with recommendations will be compiled on three themes: "the environment;" "the recovery of rights;" and "education and women."

? G-8 summit of various religious leaders: (July 1-4) to be sponsored by the World Conference on Religion and Peace (WCRP). More

than 100 representatives of Christianity, Islam, Buddhism and other religions from about 20 countries will participate in the summit to work out action programs on the environment, poverty, nuclear nonproliferation, and other issues.

? G-8 summit of university presidents: (from June 29 through July 1) to be sponsored by Hokkaido University, bringing together more than 30 university presidents inside and outside Japan to draw up a statement focusing on both efforts for environment protection and economic development, with "sustainability" as the buzzword. It will also hold symposiums intended for citizens.

The university summit will be held at a Sapporo hotel, and other meetings are planned to be held at the Sapporo Convention Center.

(7) Seiron (Opinion) column by Hisahiko Okazaki: Hope for DPP-led government to bring peace to the Taiwan Strait

SANKEI (Page 13) (Slightly abridged)

TOKYO 00000127 010 OF 014

January 11, 2008

Hisahiko Okazaki, former ambassador to Thailand

Proposal for abandonment of arms?

The following passage, which was not given wide press coverage, was included in a report President Hu Jintao made to the 17th National Congress of the Communist Party of China last fall.

"We would like to make a solemn appeal: On the basis of the one-China principle, let us discuss a formal end to the state of hostility between the two sides, reach a peace agreement, construct a framework for peaceful development of cross-Strait relations, and thus usher in a new phase of peaceful development."

Since the moment I heard of that passage, I have considered it an important proposal.

Taiwan has previously called on China to abandon the option of using armed force, but China rejected Taiwan's call. If a peace agreement as stated in Hu's report means renouncing the use of armed force, it is a landmark proposal and meets the Japanese and American policy goals of seeking a peaceful solution of the Taiwan Strait issue.

Neither the reunification of two Chinas nor Taiwan's acceptance of "one country, two systems" is made a condition. What (Hu) made a basis is the "one-China principle." "One China" is indeed the very basis of the Taiwan issue and an adaptable concept.

When both sides across the Taiwan Strait decided in 1992 to hold a dialogue, China made it a condition for (Taiwan) to accept the "one-China principle." But the result was that without reaching a clear agreement on what one China actually means, bilateral talks between Koo Chen-fu and Wang Daohan took place in April 1993.

Afterwards, China noted that Taiwan accepted the "one-China principle," while Taiwan asserted: "Both sides of the Taiwan Strait have not reached any specific conclusion about the expression 'one China' neither in the Hong Kong talks set by the (Beijing-based) Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Strait and the (Taiwan-based) Straits Exchange Foundation, both of which were authorized by their respective governments to arrange the talks, nor in the development that followed the talks.'" (Taiwan Weekly Review issued on May 5, 2005)

Kuomintang would follow China's lead

Reportedly, the Taiwanese side suggested that both China and Taiwan interpreted one China in their own ways respectively. At any rate, the talks between both sides of the Taiwan Strait were held, setting aside China's assertion that the condition for the talks to be held is for both sides to reach agreement on one China.

My conclusion is that if the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) wins

in the next presidential election, it will be good for Taiwan to start negotiations with Beijing on the basis of Hu Jintao's proposal. Why the DPP? The reason is that negotiations with China will be delicate as seen in the question of one China, so I believe persons who have principles about Taiwan's identity like those members of the DDP should engage in negotiations.

TOKYO 00000127 011 OF 014

This does not mean I do not trust Ma Ying-jeou. In fact, Ma reportedly states he does not favor reunification and that it is no problem that China and Taiwan have their respective interpretations of one China.

What Ma has said, however, is different from what the Kuomintang has asserted in the past. And I also can't sweep away the worry that the Kuomintang-led government may follow the lead of China.

Tough negotiator necessary

Hu Jintao declared a one-China principle, but because of complex domestic circumstances, China has yet to spell it out. It would do so but only after discussing it with Taiwan in the future and coordinating views at home. Until then, China and Taiwan can be expected to engage in tough-minded, fierce negotiations. Given this, I think it is necessary for a person with a strong beliefs about Taiwan's identity to engage in such talks.

If the DPP serves as a negotiator with China, I think it is not a bad idea for Taiwan to come to terms with China on the term "one China."

Specifically, the best policy is that Taiwan will add the condition that China must agree to Taiwan's membership in the United Nations in return for Taiwan conceding on the one China principle. If that is realized, a number of principles stated in the U.N. Charter, such as sovereign equality, noninterference in internal affairs, and a peaceful solution of the dispute, would come true.

If that condition is set as an absolute condition, I do not care if someone backed by Kuomintang assumes the post of the president of Taiwan. It would be good if no such unnecessary conditions as "being neutral" or "future reunification" are added. In the case of Hong Kong, "one country, two systems" has been introduced. As a result, no popular election has taken place for the past 10 years (after Hong Kong's reversion to China). What has made me worry is the fact that there are only 40 years in which Hong Kong can enjoy a free society.

Hu Jintao is rumored to be flexible in his political approach toward other countries.

Hu may come to seek to settle the cross-strait issue in a couple of years upon judging that it would be unavoidable that the Taiwanese public would become more Taiwan-oriented year after year. If he does so, Taiwan will have an upper hand. Taiwan will not have to compromise at all on the issue of obtaining UN membership.

If Hu is such an insightful person and has strong political power enough to be flexible in political approach, East Asia can realize the dream of bringing peace to the region after a half century of hostility.

(8) Koga, Tanigaki factions to formally agree today to merger plan; Factional realignment to be accelerated with eye on Lower House dissolution

MAINICHI (Page 5) (Full)  
January 16, 2008

The Koga and Tanigaki factions in the ruling Liberal Democratic

TOKYO 00000127 012 OF 014

Party (LDP) will formally agree on a merger in May in a meeting

today of their heads, Makoto Koga, chairman of the LDP Election Committee, and Sadakazu Tanigaki, chairman of the party's Policy Research Council. The two factions were derived from the former Miyazawa faction (Kochikai). The move is in anticipation of a possible dissolution of the House of Representative for a snap general election. It is apparently aimed at the group becoming a force to support Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda. The new faction will advocate that it is a liberal force and that its policy will be to give priority to the daily lives of people. There is a move in conservative forces to support the policy line of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. As a result, the trend of factional realignment is now accelerating.

"As showed in former Prime Minister Hayato Ikeda's income-doubling plan, the mission of Kochikai is to focus on the daily lives of people," Tanigaki stressed in a speech delivered on Jan. 12 in Ayase City, Kyoto.

The membership of Koga and Tanigaki factions totals 61, making it the third largest LDP faction, following the second largest Tsushima faction (membership of 68).

Kochikai was founded by former Prime Minister Ikeda in June 1957. As former Prime Minister Shigeru Yoshida's following, it followed a dovish policy line of placing more priority on the economy than on Japan arming itself.

Kochikai later changed its name to the Miyazawa faction. The Miyazawa faction was divided into two groups -- one headed by Koichi Kato and the other led by Yohei Kono. The Kono group is now called the Aso faction. Because of the so-called Kato rebellion in November 2000, in which he called on then Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori to step down, the Kato faction split into the Koga and Tanigaki factions. The factions have been prevented from recommending their members for cabinet posts since the inauguration of the Koizumi government. Seiwakai, the Machimura faction, from which the past three premiers and the incumbent prime minister hailed, has sharply grown in its strength. The political presence of the former Kochikai has been on the decline.

The aim of the merger of the two factions is to restore their assertiveness in the LDP. It is difficult for them to secure public support by advocating the principle of being "liberal." Tanigaki indicated in his remarks that he wants to promote instead a policy of giving priority to the daily lives of people, which the Fukuda government has underscored, and use this principle to realign the LDP. Former Vice LDP President Taku Yamasaki said in a meeting of his faction: "The new core of forces giving consideration to the daily lives of people will definitely rise up." Meanwhile, the conservative force, which suffered a setback due to Abe's resignation, aims at recovering its position. Shoichi Nakagawa, a member of the Ibuki faction, launched last December a cross-factional study group. Although the group includes many lawmakers who support former Secretary General Taro Aso, it generally gives favorable consideration to Abe's policy of building a "beautiful country." One member said: "When it is time to find a candidate to succeed Prime Minister Fukuda, I will move to support Aso." As a result, LDP members supporting Fukuda feel alarmed by such a development.

(9) Extraordinary session of divided Diet closes without breaking

TOKYO 00000127 013 OF 014

away from 1955 political framework

ASAHI (Page 4) (Abridged)  
January 16, 2008

The divided Diet, in which the opposition Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ or Minshuto) is the largest party in the House of Councillors, presented Japanese politics with a good opportunity to replace the "1955 framework" of choosing postponement or the rule of majority, symbolized by the Liberal Democratic Party's dominated system dating back to 1955 when the party was formed, with a 2007 system. But in handling the government-sponsored refueling support bill, neither the ruling camp nor the opposition bloc took action to find common

ground, placing importance on managing the Diet. The Diet is required to make concessions in order to find the answer, while playing the role of making contentious points clear through standoffs. The task of creating a new system for managing the Diet by nurturing the move that emerged in the just-ended Diet session has been carried over to the next regular session.

Enacting priority bills by the rule of majority and postponing less important legislation is the basic style that has been widely accepted by the ruling and opposition blocs under the 1955 framework. The opposition camp has constantly played up its opposition to taking votes on bills by protracting Diet deliberations. One example was the enactment in 2006 of the Basic Education Law with a majority vote of the ruling parties after a total of 190 hours of deliberations in the two houses of the Diet.

The 1955 framework has been effective in highlighting priority bills' contentious points, while avoiding the abuse of numerical superiority. But it has failed to prompt the ruling and opposition camps to join efforts to enact good laws by finding common denominators.

People had been hopeful that the divided Diet would bring change to the political scene, with National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies Professor Jun Iio calling it a great chance to fundamentally review the established practice and precedents. Specifically, they expected that the ruling camp's adoption of the opposition bloc's viewpoint would result in fiscal and security policies reflecting popular will.

Nevertheless, the refueling support legislation, a top priority for the government and ruling parties, followed a path typical of the 1955 system. In November, DPJ President Ichiro Ozawa sealed off inter-party talks, saying, "We will not use any means that looks like rigging a bid between political parties." The ruling coalition, too, decided to readopt the legislation in the Lower House soon after the talks with the DPJ on forming a grand coalition fell through. As a result, despite 86 hours of Diet deliberations, the two sides endeavored only to play up their respective standpoints to the public and failed to search for common ground.

Buds of revision talks and change

There were some signs of change toward a 2007-model management of the Diet, while being tied to the 1955 political system.

Some government-initiated bills were enacted after incorporating the ruling block's viewpoint into them. For instance, the opposition bloc had fiercely objected to a Broadcast Law revision including

TOKYO 00000127 014 OF 014

administrative measures against television broadcasters, presented under the former Abe cabinet. Before the Diet was divided, the ruling parties planned steamroller it, but during the latest Diet session, the ruling camp sounded out the DPJ on substantially revising the legislation and successfully enacted it in cooperation with the largest opposition party in the end.

The DPJ had also called for the retroactive application of the lawmaker-initiated revision of the Law to Support the Rebuilding of Lives of Disaster Victims as well as for direct support. The ruling parties opposed the DPJ's requests in line with the government's wishes, but it managed to enact it during the latest Diet session owing to concessions by the largest opposition party.

It was particularly epochal that the ruling parties and the DPJ established a panel in a committee to discuss the legislation. Another inter-party council was set up to discuss subsidies to those who contracted hepatitis C after being administered with contaminated blood products. Those panels might result in a system of establishing subcommittees or regularly using upper- and lower-house councils.

The previous Diet, however, was undoubtedly marked by face-offs between the ruling and opposition blocs with Lower House dissolution in mind. Cooperation between the two camps on the aforementioned

legislations owed much to personal ties between lawmakers of the two sides who were responsible for the subjects. Many challenges must be overcome before realizing a 2007-model Diet of facing off over controversial bills and making visible concessions on legislations containing common denominators.

For separating the political situation from deliberations on bills, aiming at an agreement through talks between the two camps and identifying unattainable challenges beforehand is one idea.

Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda in a press conference yesterday said: "I had to use the trial-and-error method in the Diet session that closed today. I would like to see the opposition parties harbor a sense of crisis as well." The ruling and opposition camps share a sense of crisis now. This is a good opportunity for the buds that emerged in the latest Diet session to burst into bloom.

26 bills enacted

The 128-day extraordinary Diet session closed yesterday after two extensions and enacting a total of 26 bills. Of them, the government endorsed 14, fewer than the 18 enacted in the 85-day extraordinary Diet session in the fall of 2006. This comes from the government's cautious stance with the divided Diet in mind.

At the same time, the ruling and opposition blocs jointly submitted many lawmaker-initiated relief bills. A bill revising the Law to Support the Rebuilding of Lives of Disaster Victims and legislation offering blanket relief to people with hepatitis C caused by tainted blood products were enacted one after another.

The bill to establish a Japanese National Security Council (JNSC), submitted by the former Abe cabinet, was the only government-sponsored bill that was scrapped.

DONOVAN